

## **ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MRS CONSTANCE BONISWA TSHABALALA**

(The interview was conducted by Khotso Pudumo with Mrs C.B. Tshabalala at 1860 Mahabane Street, Batho, Bloemfontein, on 13 May 2019. Please note the following: **Pudumo**: Interviewer; **Tshabalala**: Interviewee. Unclear\inaudible speech is indicated by a question mark [?]. [Sic] in most cases indicates a grammar mistake made by interviewee. Text in brackets [ ] is added for clarity.)

**Pudumo**: What are your names and surname?

**Tshabalala**: Okay, my names are Constance Boniswa, my maiden surname was Mothlale but now I am married to Tshabalala.

**Pudumo**: Where and when were you born?

**Tshabalala**: I was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1961 in Bloemfontein and then when I was one-and-a-half years old I went home to Cape Town.

**Pudumo**: Okay, who were your parents?

**Tshabalala**: My mother was Ciena Mohlale and Joseph Mohlale.

**Pudumo**: Cina with a C-I?

**Tshabalala**: C-I-E-N-A [Sienah].

**Pudumo**: Ciena.

**Tshabalala**: Yes.

**Pudumo**: Who were your grandparents?

**Tshabalala**: My grandparents were Mary Mohlale and Michael Mohlale.

**Pudumo**: Where did you spend most of your childhood? I heard you mentioning that you were in Cape Town.

**Tshabalala**: I spent most of my childhood in Cape Town.

**Pudumo**: How was it like in Cape Town at that time while you were growing up?

**Tshabalala:** Cape Town by that time, it was not nice because as I grew up I recall like, when you went to town, there were some places that you were not allowed to enter. There were these boards that you will find written “nie-blank”... what did they write?

**Pudumo:** *Geen Blankes* [no whites].

**Tshabalala:** *Blankes*, let say it was blacks and non-blacks, things like that.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** So, it was things like that, we would know that in town you were not allowed to enter into Golden Acres [shopping centre], only white people entered there. You see, that thing ended up working on my mind.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** That was unfair, you see. Then sometimes when it was school holidays I would go to my grandmother’s workplace to assist her. So during school holidays I would do that, when we entered in the morning we would find that she had two slices of bread put out for her and she was going to have it with tea, one teabag. So, because she brought me there with her the two slices of bread had butter and jam. That is what we would find every time we went there, she had to share those two slices, I had to take one slice and she took the other one. We worked there until three o’clock, the time she did the bedding because they [white employer and family], they would leave the house without making their beds. Whilst she is busy with the bedding I would be doing the brass of that whole house and it was a double storey-house. We would work like that and since we came in to work and ate at that time we would work until we clocked out my grandmother and I. So, that thing also affected me because it was really unfair, why did we have to live like this?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Okay, we left and went home and this thing [what the interviewee’s grandmother and black people went through at work] came to my mind and I saw it that it is unjustified and called other learners

[interviewer refers to the late 1960s and early 1970s]. I explained to them about that thing and said to them?: “people are you aware that some of you during the holidays, you would accompany your grandmothers or mothers to go assist them at work?” So, I found that I was not the only one doing that, you see. Then there was a guy called Jeffrey Mangputa, he started by saying to me: “you know what Connie [interviewee’s nickname, this must come to an end, this thing that is happening”. And as we had meetings, we held our meetings in I.D. Mkhize High School, we held them there. But by that time we were in Fezeka High School.

**Pudumo:** Fezeka with an F?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, it is F-E-Z-E-K-A.

**Pudumo:** Fezeka.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, then the meetings we had them at I.D. Mkhize.

**Pudumo:** I.D. Mkhize.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, then we were with Lizzy Mahashe, there was a lot of us and then you know as blacks there would be those that would take the information to the police. Then we found out that we were ‘rated’ [interviewee refers to being put on the spot and for police to be aware of you], you see?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** As we were rated we ended up not sleeping at our homes, we had to wear balaclavas [fabric mask that hides one’s face] so, that we won’t be easily recognisable. We slept in the woods and there were this veld in Nyanga East [township near Cape Town], we slept there in that veld. Being a girl amongst many boys, about seven of them, we slept there. During daytime that is when we would go out and start going to schools. Okay, they [police] would chase us and they shot at us, used rubber bullets, those gun shots and ended up injured here [interviewee pointing to her knee], I got cut by the wire we climbed over at the railway.

**Pudumo:** At the railway station.

**Tshabalala:** I got cut by the wire on my knee but I kept going on like that. You see here, that is where they shot me here [interviewee pointing to the bullet wound on her leg]. They [police] struggled to arrest us and then there was a policeman that we attended church with, he lived in... [?] that policeman, he is the one that ended up influencing the boers that he knew this girl [interviewee referring to herself]. They had taken a picture of me in town, holding placards and then at three o'clock when I returned from the *mzabalozo* [toyi toyi] I had a call at home from church I was called to come to church. So, I went to church and when I arrived there the pastor and his wife sat me down and said: "my child, the thing you're doing isn't going to benefit you, stop doing the things you're doing, look now you're appearing on newspapers". When I looked at the newspaper indeed I appeared in that newspaper. They furthermore said that the man [the police officer who was in the same church as her], he isn't happy about the thing that you are doing because people's houses are getting burned and stuff. But I said: "the burnt houses belong to informers and we are sick and tired of this life, our grandmothers and grandfathers are not living well".

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** This is not the life, then when I returned, there were ten vans [police vans] were following me I had to jump,jump,jump,jump [interviewee refers to going through other street trying to fool the police not to know where she lived with her family]. I arrived at another house and I slept there and they couldn't find me. The following day I mentioned that in the meeting [meeting with fellow comrades] that thing of that policeman and then the comrades decided that we should go burn his house.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** We burned that house, really and I knew him that man, he was the man I fellowshiped with at church but we really burned his house. After that we planned that for the night we are going to leave and escape to Lesotho because I was the only who knew Sesotho and the rest didn't know Sesotho.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Apparently that was the night that I was going to get arrested and that day my grandmother said this to me: "Nana this thing of you sleeping in the veld and me not knowing where you slept, you are going to get hurt". Then I told her: "the people that I am with they do not have thoughts that are negative about me, they are like my brothers, do not stress". Then she said she felt like that day I should sleep at home. I said: "mama I do not want to sleep at home". She insisted that I should sleep at home.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** And she was crying and crying, I said okay, let me just please you and I am telling you that I am feeling this thing that I was being raided on daily basis, I am going to get arrested. Please do not cry. My grandmother said: "no they [police] won't". I said: "okay, fine". Just around five past one in the morning, I heard the sound of vans [police bakkies] they would be driving them very slowly and I said to Ma: "you know what today, I am telling they are going to arrest me"! She asked: "what is it?" I said: I hear them coming and I jumped from the bed, however, I was already late, when I opened the kitchen door they were already on the roof, others in the yard.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Just like that, right they arrested me they beat me up to the point that I did not want myself after that.

**Pudumo:** How old were you when that happened?

**Tshabalala:** By that time I was 19 years old. Yes, I was 19 and then my grandmother started crying and my brothers and everyone was like miserable. I was very strong, I did not cry as I was getting beaten up by the police. I said to them if there is one thing that you are going to allow me is every morning when I wake up I make breakfast and tea for my elderly. They told me that I am stubborn and what not and that I am *hardegat* [stubborn in Afrikaans] what what and they were speaking their Afrikaans, they said: "*vandag jy gaan die waarheid praat*" [today you are going to speak the truth]. I said: "it is fine that *waarheid* of yours but if you could only just allow me to do whatever I told you I need to

do". Right then I boiled the water; at that time we used to boil water using primus stove.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** I boiled the water with that stove, I made tea for my mother and made bread for her and afterwards I said: "now, you can take me!" everyone was crying in the house but I was strong [interviewee did not cry].

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Then we went outside. They used to travel with a valiant and their informers would be inside that valiant and their faces would be covered with a bag [cloth bag].

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** It was a black bag, and then they asked that person: "*is dit sy?*" [is that her?] and that person nodded his head. I then said: "you, we are going to get you, no matter when it is and how many years, we are going to catch you". They took me and threw me inside the van like some dog. I said it is fine, I will die for the change I want, I want freedom, I want equality and I don't want black people living this way [during apartheid].

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** I was in a holding cell for two full weeks, Gugulethu Police Station, my comrades, parents, whoever were looking for me. The police lied to them about my whereabouts, I was there [in the police cell] and they lied to them. I could hear the way they were singing and they took stones throwing them at the police station and I was still in there. The police told them I was not there. I was locked up there alone, not knowing that my family was sending me food everyday and they were the ones who ate the food and threw away the food containers. From there I was moved to Pollsmoor [prison] that is where I stayed a while there. There in Pollsmoor I couldn't see whoever came to see me, I could only hear their voices, they were able to see me but I was unable to see their faces. That is how we communicated.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** Before we were arrested, at ID Mkhize we would get information like we would write letters and that was when Mme Winnie [Mandela] was locked up at Brandfort [Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was banned to Brandfort in the Free State] so we wrote letters and we sent them to Mme Mathe in Mahabane [Street in Batho] so, the letters arrived there and there were some from Bloemfontein. They would take them and pass them there [Winnie Mandela in Brandfort]. There was this old lady in Gabashane [Street in Batho] Mme Morake, what her house number is, I was looking for it, it is 2018.

**Pudumo:** House number 2018.

**Tshabalala:** In Gabashane, Mme Morake I got to know her because her son Geneva Morake was also in the struggle he went to Robben Island but was locked up in Pietersburg [today known as Polokwane]. He was locked up in Pietersburg and then Mme Morake when she went somewhere with her child, Odukile, her child he stayed at the flat here, they went to Pietersburg to go see him. He went to trial for a year and then he was imprisoned for six years to Robben Island. The time I was released there I went in '76 and '79 that was when I was released. When I arrived at home they did not waste time then my brother booked for me a flight to Bloemfontein. I had to come complete my studies and stop the liberation things.

**Pudumo:** Focus on your education.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** What can you remember about specific incidents from your childhood that left an impression on you? The things that you mentioned that happened in Cape Town. Where they similar when you arrived in Bloemfontein?

**Tshabalala:** Okay, there is something that I have forgotten.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** When I was locked up, I was tortured.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Every time they want the truth out of me, what is black power all about, and they wanted the truth out of me. They burnt me on my stomach [form of torturing] up until now those marks are still here. There is a machine of theirs whereby you sit on a desk and you put your hands like this in it, there was a button they pressed on the wall and that button when they pressed it would shut down and your nails would fall off. You will see blood only and you will cry to the point of not having any tears left to cry. You felt that pain, it was painful, very painful that was the thing. Then by the time I got out there, I was angry with my parents and whoever I was hurt, I remember when I got home I was not talking to them. They asked me why I was like that. I answered: “none of you went to see me when I was held in the nearby police station in Section Three”. They answered and said we brought food for you every day, every day we brought food for you at that police station. That was the time that I realised that the police were doing what they wanted.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** They would give you a sandwich and inside that sandwich there was something inside that sandwich. Then I would decline it because we had lessons that we were taught and told by the likes of Mme Winnie who gave us ideas even when we were in Cape Town. She mentioned what we shouldn't do when we were incarcerated because this is going to happen. So, we already had ideas [advice] about what to do and what not to do.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** We were smart when we were detained, so the thing that I saw when I arrived here [Bloemfontein, Batho] was the same as in Cape Town because apartheid was the same, like there wasn't any difference.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** When you arrive in town somewhere you will find that they have everything right, tar road and street lights working. In the location the houses were built with clay, and they were falling apart. The primus stoves that were used in Cape Town were the same ones that were used here in Bloemfontein. The thing that made me upset the most was the time when you arrive at 9 [PM] you had to be out of town,

irrespective of whether you are with your parents or not but nine o'clock you must be out of town.

**Pudumo:** The siren would go off to remind you that you must be cleared out of town.

**Tshabalala:** There was that siren and there was this thing of when I arrived at home. I had to go register at the Pass Office; there was a Pass Office next to Phahamisang [Primary School, Batho].

**Pudumo:** In Lovedale Street.

**Tshabalala:** Exactly! I had to go there; my mother had to go there to register me there. I asked them [parents] why, because I am your child. My mother said: "If they found you at home they are going to arrest you".

**Pudumo:** You are talking about Lodgers [permit for visitors].

**Tshabalala:** Yes it is Lodgers; we [the parents] will also get into trouble. Eish and anyone who visits have to be registered there. I was like I think this worst; even where I came from [Cape Town] was like that it was just that.

**Pudumo:** You weren't aware of it.

**Tshabalala:** I was not aware of it. I said this is now really worst. The thing that I saw here, okay, the youth here [Batho] were active but there were few you see. They pulled each other hence I ended up having some of them that I communicated with. You see, and I still wasn't done with my work [activism] here [Cape Town] you see, but I was communicating with them [comrades in Cape Town] and tell what is what.

**Pudumo:** Can I ask the following question: what can you remember that your parents or grandparents told you about stories of their lives?

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Did your grandmother tell you such stories?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, my grandmother was the one who would tell me those stories. Like how was life like for them and they used to live in Elsie's River [Elsie's River is a suburb of Cape Town, South Africa. In 1980's

the suburb, restricted to coloured people] there in Elsie's River they were removed there by the boers, they were beaten and it was not nice.

**Pudumo:** Was it forced removal?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, it was forced removal. They were removed from Elsie's River; they were told that the area was going to become a Coloured area. Blacks were totally not allowed to stay in those areas and one other thing was that they had to buy water, I think 20 litres of water it cost them R1 at that time. That water they had to get it from a communal tap in the street, it was not from taps inside their yards.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** So, that was part of their struggle, they had to stand in long queues to get water and they were long. And there was no one who was supposed to stay in the location, everyone had to be pushed to go look for work. You see, that was *Kaffir Oppas* [supervising black people].

**Pudumo:** *Loaferskap*?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, my mother called it "Kaffir Oppas" that a Kaffir shouldn't stay without doing anything *daan gaan hulle maniere kry* [then they will have manners] as my mother said. So, those were the things she would tell me about, that also whether you like it or not especially as a man *Jy moet gaan werk soek* [you must go look for work] that is what she would say.

**Pudumo:** It was really tough then. When did you become aware of apartheid, how old were you when you became aware of it? Then the story that you told me, you said that you were around 19 years...

**Tshabalala:** I was nine years old.

**Pudumo:** Nine years, okay.

**Tshabalala:** I was nine years, when Mama used to take me with her to her piece jobs. Those part-time jobs she went to.

**Pudumo:** Can you please tell me about the schools that you attended? You mentioned the schools from Cape Town.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, I attended the following schools: Lehlohonolo Primary School; I then left Lehlohonolo when I completed my Standard Six; then I went to Fezeka High School.

**Pudumo:** And then here...

**Tshabalala:** Then when I arrived here in Bloemfontein I was able to complete my studies, I went to Lereko Secondary School.

**Pudumo:** So, you didn't go to Sehunelo [Secondary School]?

**Tshabalala:** No. I went to Lereko High School.

**Pudumo:** That is where you received your Senior Certificate?

**Tshabalala:** When I was supposed to get my Senior Certificate, my matric I did it until September then there was that thing of the police that was coming to my home, you see.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Then my mother said: "I think you must go back to Cape Town". Then I was so miserable and I dropped everything but I got a part time job R-Bytes Genoort [Sic].

**Pudumo:** R?

**Tshabalala:** R B-e-i-d-s G-e-n-o-o-r-t. [Arbeitsgenot]

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** R Beids Genoort.

**Pudumo:** Genoort.

**Tshabalala:** Primary school.

**Pudumo:** So, there you worked as?

**Tshabalala:** I was a temp [temporary] teacher; they did not have enough teachers. I was not able to complete mine and there it was at the plots. Because as they were looking for me during the day, they could not find me I was there at the Plots.

**Pudumo:** At the schools, the school that you came from would the teachers there talk about politics? Did they conscientize you, the learners about what the law enforced, for instance that a black person couldn't enter certain shops and that you have to buy through the window. I heard that when a black person bought coke he/she was given a hot one that was not placed in a fridge but a white person would get a cold one.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, that is the truth. The white person would get a cold one.

**Pudumo:** Those kind of things, were the teachers conscientizing you about them?

**Tshabalala:** No, our teachers would... there was this one teacher I got to know well, because I would sit with him after school. Mr Tshenudi.

**Pudumo:** Tshenudi.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, at Lereko [Secondary School] he was a person who was politically minded. The other ones totally they would talk us out of politics.

**Pudumo:** You were involved in the struggle when you witnessed and saw how your grandmother was treated when you were nine years old?

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** And then that is when you became a little bit involved in it by wanting to see a change and you organised a meeting with your fellow classmates. Did you realise when you saw those things happening and then decided that you are getting involved in the struggle?

**Tshabalala:** When I arrived in Fezeka High School, I got involved [politics] when I got in high school, but since that thing had been bugging me. Then when I arrived in high school I started that, I was doing Form One that was when I started.

**Pudumo:** Did you join any political organisations?

**Tshabalala:** No, I did not join any political organisation, you mean during those times?

**Pudumo:** Yes, during those times.

**Tshabalala:** No, we had things like...

**Pudumo:** Student associations?

**Tshabalala:** Student Association Movements, we had that Student Movement at our school. When we started this thing, we started it when we started performing casts you see. You know what casts are?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, we would start with casts; we would call our cast 'Freedom'.

**Pudumo:** 'Freedom'.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, and for it to get approval we had to have two scripts.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** The one script was fake that was taken to the boers, you see.

**Pudumo:** Interviewer laughing.

**Tshabalala:** With ours [real script] we would act out the real apartheid thing.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** You see on that one [real script] we would do that.

**Pudumo:** So, the first one was a fake one and the second one was the actual script.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** So that they [police] could approve that cast.

**Pudumo:** What role did you play during the struggle? Were you the one who was able to get people together?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, I was a leader.

**Pudumo:** Leader?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, I was the leader and let me say I was a girl leader. Jeff Mangputa was the boys' leader, so we were both leaders.

**Pudumo:** How did you survive day-to-day conditions, in the veld?

**Tshabalala:** It was not nice because I would always be wearing this overall that belonged to one of the boys with balaclavas and for that night you feel the cold, there were snakes in that field, it wasn't nice at all.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** It was not nice and without food we couldn't and that is whereby we ended up using the money for the casts. We collected it so that we can use it to be able to escape [skip the country] to Zimbabwe or Lesotho.

**Pudumo:** So, where was the cast performed?

**Tshabalala:** We performed in Gugulethu Hall.

**Pudumo:** Gugulethu Hall.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Okay and then mama, when you came back to Bloemfontein to Batho, in 1980s there was a student uprising wherein there was no schooling in Bloemfontein. Were you here when that took place?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, I was here.

**Pudumo:** Can you tell me about that, what happened and how was it like then?

**Tshabalala:** I was in Lereko [Secondary School] and then the police would like in the morning, when we were still at the assembly, they

would use their teargas. We would at the assembly praying and they would start with their teargas, we had to disperse besides we would go to the location. That is when the riots began, you see?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Tyres were burnt and things were broken, some went to town and caused uproar there.

**Pudumo:** There was a wall that separated Sehunelo...

**Tshabalala:** Sehunelo and Lereko, we broke down that wall.

**Pudumo:** They called it 'the wall of Berlin'?

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Interviewer laughing.

**Tshabalala:** Exactly.

**Pudumo:** What happened?

**Tshabalala:** We discovered that wall it separated us, in Lereko the Sehunelo learners would be called by names that they are too forward and in Sehunelo the Lereko learners, teacher Winkie [Direko] she would say Lereko learners are Basotho, you see?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** She would say they were naughty and that they were Basotho, mme Winkie was a politically minded person. So, we ended up saying that this wall is separating us and we can't get together.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** And then after we broke it [the wall] down we went to the first meeting we had together in Sehunelo Hall. You see, and we had Mme Winkie with us in that hall and she supported us at that time.

**Pudumo:** How did the learners break down that wall? [interviewer laughing].

**Tshabalala:** It was not easy, we took these 10 pounds hammer and used them to break down that wall, and we borrowed them and whatever you could have especially when it was heavy enough we used it.

**Pudumo:** Wow.

**Tshabalala:** We did it.

**Pudumo:** And then it so happened that the first learner was shot, Papi Makotoko?

**Tshabalala:** Papi Makotoko.

**Pudumo:** The one they say is the Hector Peterson of Bloemfontein.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** There is a lot of debate about Papi Makotoko that he was not an activist, he was just a boy who, when he heard the commotion, decided to join other learners. What is your take on that?

**Tshabalala:** Regarding Papi Makotoko, I can say in all the meetings that we had as activists, he [Papi Makotoko] was there, you see. There were some he did not attend but in most cases he attended meetings, I saw him in those meetings.

**Pudumo:** Because there are two sides to this story of Papi Makotoko.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Some people they say he was an activist, whilst others says he wasn't, he was a boy who got drawn to the learners marching [boycotting] and joined them.

**Tshabalala:** Seriously, I want to speak the truth, I did see him in meetings.

**Pudumo:** Meetings.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Where were the meetings held? Some interviewees said they would hold their meetings that side of Seeisa Ramabodu Stadium [currently called Dr Petrus Molemela Stadium].

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Sometimes meetings were held in a garage at some person's house. In those meetings what was the topic of discussion?

**Tshabalala:** With us the meetings that we had, were held at Mme Mathe's house.

**Pudumo:** Mme Mathe.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, we would have our meetings there at Mme Mathe's house because we were groups.

**Pudumo:** Yes, when you meet with other comrades, what was the agenda?

**Tshabalala:** Our agenda would be to give each other advice and also the things that we should do to bring down the boers.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** That we must get rid of this Afrikaans because we suffered because of the boers, a lot. We would also give tips like when they throw their [police] teargas; you tell the comrades that they should always have milk with them, litres of milk or pint of milk. It is good to use milk after you encountered teargas, using a cloth that has been dipped in milk.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** We gave each other advice, you see?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Also what we had to do the following day, break in somewhere and we did this to draw attention, their attention.

**Pudumo:** And Peter Sejake, the second student to be shot, what about him?

**Tshabalala:** Peter Sejake, I do not have full information about him, I do not want to lie.

**Pudumo:** Because I heard that he was also one of the learners who got shot. I also heard that during Papi Makotoko's funeral there was a rally that was used to conscientize people. At that funeral the police were there, was there an uproar?

**Tshabalala:** What I know is that with Papi's funeral.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, there was a rally at the graveyard but then the thing that was not nice was that, you know you are busy burying your loved ones and then there are a lot of police around. You see, they were so many of them, more than us the people who came to the funeral. They came with their Hippos [armoured vehicles], you know.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** It wasn't nice, that is the thing that caused us to have that thing from here on, come what may if they want to shoot, let them shoot.

**Pudumo:** I also heard that Nelson Mandela's daughter was there to represent her father?

**Tshabalala:** Zinzi.

**Pudumo:** Zinzi yes.

**Tshabalala:** Zinzi was there.

**Pudumo:** And then mama I hear that Mme Winnie [Madikizela-Mandela] was one of your role models?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, she was.

**Pudumo:** Talk to me about that [interviewer laughing].

**Tshabalala:** They would even say I resemble her alot. Mme Winnie, we were not able to meet with her every time we try to go to Brandfort she would constantly be under surveillance. Her house was always surrounded by police in Brandfort, that is why we couldn't go and meet up with her. The only way we would communicate with her was through letters. But just like that visiting her in person we couldn't do that. Our concern was our father who was locked up on Robben Island for us to

know that he was getting information and also when would he get released, because our concern was that since well we are fighting and he should be released now, it was that thing that was inside of us.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** When you lived in Cape Town and you see that there is Robben Island over there and therein is someone [Nelson Mandela] who is so so [important person]. We were not supposed to go there, totally we weren't supposed to go there [Robben Island].

**Pudumo:** And then when his case was brought here in Bloemfontein you weren't able to attend it?

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Can you tell me, what was it like to be a political activist, the sacrifices that you had to make? When you compare your life from then to now also you mentioned during the interview that some of the things you did, you didn't get recognition for it? Not getting a thank you for your contribution, even a R5 as a way to say thank you for your contribution to liberation.

**Tshabalala:** You know, what I can say is hence I say to you, we saw people boycotting and stuff and they were happy. For us in our side it was fun because you were doing that out of anger because you felt that this must be corrected. It must be right, you see?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** And we did those things because we are in tears crying, we are singing, crying and marching. Thinking about those who were arrested and that we wanted them out, you see?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** It wasn't okay and it was not fun, to see what now happens whereby people are sitting in their chairs and it is so nice for them, they are earning a lot of money and they aren't worried about us on the ground. They do not even recognise us, they do not care and they are not interested in wanting to know us. I would go to different offices taking my CV's and talking to them. None of them is taking me seriously that this really happened to this person. I remember when my brother passed away in Cape Town. I went to the funeral. When the people in Cape

Town saw me, they said I was supposed to be in parliament. I said to them guys please let it go because that hurts me and they ask what I am doing currently where I stay. I told them I am not working, I am unemployed in Bloemfontein. They ask how come and I said yes, it is like that. There was a time when they said to me why can't you talk to Helen Zille and I responded by saying that I won't do that because I wasn't fighting for Helen Zille fought for us. The pain that one feels when you see that the people that you fought for are sitting in their chairs and they do not care.

**Pudumo:** It is painful indeed. Can you tell me about the underground meetings?

**Tshabalala:** Our meetings where, at home?

**Pudumo:** There in Cape Town or here in Bloemfontein, how did the underground meetings operate?

**Tshabalala:** Please explain it a bit?

**Pudumo:** For instance I heard an interviewee say that there used to be ANC offices when you pass the cooling towers, they said that building has an underground room whereby upstairs it is normal offices and below it is where the ANC things are done.

**Tshabalala:** Okay, as I said here in Bloemfontein I wasn't...

**Pudumo:** That active.

**Tshabalala:** But in Cape Town our underground meetings were held in the veld that is where we held our underground meetings. Right in the bushes, we did not have a building that we could use.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** Because they monitored us all over.

**Pudumo:** How close are you with other activists currently?

**Tshabalala:** Most of them have passed away, the one that is still alive it is Jeffrey. Yes we are still close but he opened his own business, I do not know what business it is but it is there in Cape Town. There was a time when Jeff said to me: Tell me did you get your R30 000? I asked

him for what? He said that was the money that we got, you see. I asked money for what? There was a time when our particulars were requested because they were giving us our R30 000 and I said: “tell me Jeff, I thought when we all do something sitting together on the table and you saw that people were receiving the money, you were supposed to ask where are the people that you know who were not there”.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Where is that one? Where is that person and what happened to that person. He said he understands my concerns but you were unreachable and I responded by saying you did not have time because you were busy with your R30 000. I did not even know where you guys went to and what happened to get those R30 000 but you got your R30 000, I did not get it.

**Pudumo:** Yes, other activists mentioned that the veterans or something like that.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** Some of them, they never got money from government; they said those that were in the struggle with them they forgot about them.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, they did not even say a word.

**Pudumo:** And they know each other well from the struggle days.

**Tshabalala:** He then says when you went to Bloemfontein I did not have your contacts and I said that is not a reason that you can give me. Because you know where my home is in Cape Town and my home is still there even until now. Why couldn't you go to my family at home and ask them where is Connie, what happened with her and can I get her numbers? You did not do that Jeff. So that is why I am saying we as blacks, you end up regretting that why did I do this?

**Pudumo:** It is painful.

**Tshabalala:** It is painful.

**Pudumo:** Another activist I spoke with said he suffered for the struggle and doesn't have anything to show for it. I sacrificed my time with my family and there are those who passed away whom their families say they wished that he wasn't an activist and involved in the struggle, right

now maybe he would have been a Doctor or something big professionally. Perhaps he could have been alive with us now, he isn't recognised and acknowledged.

**Tshabalala:** Nothing.

**Pudumo:** It is truly painful.

**Tshabalala:** It is very painful.

**Pudumo:** What happened to spies, when it was discovered that a certain person is an informer?

**Tshabalala:** I do not want to lie, at that time I wouldn't hesitate I would not say anything, if we discovered that you were an informer I got the address and then all the students we go there. We take petrol bomb and shot it, that house would burn but we liked the police houses because they had electricity, we threw the petrol bomb and immediately it ignited and by the time they come to fight the fire we are in another section and we petrol bomb another one.

**Pudumo:** Moved to the next section.

**Tshabalala:** I do not want to lie that one I did, with people's lives we did disaster, I do not want to lie.

**Pudumo:** And when Mme Winnie came up with the necklace, was it practiced?

**Tshabalala:** We did it also and when we did it, we would if we found out that your father is a policeman and is an informer or even informer and that person is not a police man. Even if you were a scholar we would take a tyre and make an example out of you, daylight.

**Pudumo:** Wow.

**Tshabalala:** We would pour petrol on the tyre and then light it, and the person would die. What we did hurts me when I look back at the cruelty we had to do when we tried to draw the attention of the police and boers that this is happening let us change the world.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** But what is my reward? That did nothing for me.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** There is nowhere were it took me, at all.

**Pudumo:** That is what hurts mme. What name was used to call a spy or informer?

**Tshabalala:** We called them informers and *impimpi*.

**Pudumo:** Alright, our grandparents like you said that they were forcibly removed?

**Tshabalala:** From Elsie's River.

**Pudumo:** Elsie's River where they had to move into...

**Tshabalala:** It was in Gugulethu.

**Pudumo:** Gugulethu.

**Tshabalala:** They had to move into Gugulethu.

**Pudumo:** Was Elsie's River nicer?

**Tshabalala:** Yes, it is that side close to the industrial side.

**Pudumo:** Local policemen, *Platkeps*, how did you solve them?

**Tshabalala:** When you were *Platkeps* it is the same we burnt your house, we did one and the same thing. We did not have mercy, even if you were my uncle or whoever and you were a policeman, you could be a policeman it is fine but the moment you become an informer and we found out that you are an informer, they wouldn't say no he is relative of Connie or her father, we would do the same thing. We didn't have mercy!

**Pudumo:** What did you do to ensure that the police or *Platkeps* did not know your plans?

**Tshabalala:** There wasn't a way, we tried and we would talk among the students that the information we shared stays only with them and that it shouldn't go anywhere. But still like that, there would be one that would

be an informer. So, what I can say is that as I am saying there was nowhere where we could say we could go have a meeting and the police not knowing where we were. When we ended up going to where I said it was the bush, it was only leaders who went there and we knew amongst us there was no one who would be an informer, we would have our meetings underground there.

**Pudumo:** Can we return to when you were in Pollsmoor Prison. Were you ever in solitary confinement? Did they place you in a cell alone?

**Tshabalala:** Yes I was alone in a cell, as I said.

**Pudumo:** How was it like? I remember Mr Norman, I once interviewed, I do not know if you know him.

**Tshabalala:** Norman who?

**Pudumo:** Norman Choane.

**Tshabalala:** No, I don't know him.

**Pudumo:** He was arrested and placed in solitary confinement and there you are not given anything besides a Bible as a way of trying to reform you.

**Tshabalala:** Yes.

**Pudumo:** So, he ended up playing with ants to try to not lose his mind. So you didn't experience something similar to that?

**Tshabalala:** It was tough but the thing that I noticed when I was locked up alone, you see that thing that you wiped your feet on, that is next to the door?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** That thing was a mattress and for it to get here in my yard, there was a man who was putting in carpets in a house and I asked him for it, I told him I want to show my children what we slept on in prison. That was your mattress and everyday at 4 pm you go and collect your 'donkey' blanket that stank and it was filthy and had fleas.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** You had to sleep in it, summer, winter the same. You sleep using that blanket and you don't get a pillow it on the cement floor. My cell was like, this room is too big. My cell was half this room.

**Pudumo:** Half this room.

**Tshabalala:** And there, here it is a toilet and toilet as in the one with a hole [not traditional flushing toilet]. There it was a cement thing that almost looks like a chair but it is not a chair it is cold cement. In the morning we would be counted and the key when they unlock to open the door its noise hits you to your heart and even when they close the cell door.

**Pudumo:** You feel it.

**Tshabalala:** It hits there, then they open in the morning and you manage to see the sun a bit and you are cold. You would then have to stand there in a line like sheep, and they would count you one, two, three, four, five, six ... to check that you are all there present. Then they will call you by name and you answer when your name is called, after that you are given food. Your food in the morning would be: the cup is made out of corrugated iron the tea or coffee I don't know what to call it, it was filthy and you don't know if you can call it coffee or tea and in the one hand you are holding your bread, you quarter [loaf of bread]. The kota it was last week Tuesday quarter given to you the following week Tuesday, it was hard and on top of it, they would have put a teaspoon of jam on top of it and that is it. They did that just to remind you that there is something called jam back at home. You are holding them like that and afterwards you are counted and then kick on the bum to return to your cells.

Back to your cell and you can't even communicate with anyone, you know as a person who thinks ahead, you would ask yourself what is next. So, as you walk back to your cell you get to see which cells are occupied by who. They would open for me this side and for the other one also. Right in your cell for you to be able to communicate with the other person, this toilet water you would splash it and the other one would hear that noise and then you will call out their names and that person would respond and say yes it is me. Then we would talk about this and that and how to do that, that was the way we communicated.

**Pudumo:** Okay.

**Tshabalala:** Through using the toilet water, you see. That was the only way, and then you would know that when the key goes in after the morning food, then you would be kicked, hit, punched or slapped on you.

**Pudumo:** Oh no.

**Tshabalala:** They were those boers.

**Pudumo:** Those hefty ones.

**Tshabalala:** Hefty and tall, you see. Yes, they are on top of you and you are this tiny person that they are doing those things to. After hitting you he would take you to his office and try and get information from you. He would ask questions like Constance don't you miss home? Then I would say, yes I miss home. Tell me if you want to go home who's your boyfriend? He wants to go and get my boyfriend at that time, that was the reason for that question.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Who's your boyfriend? I said I do not have one. He would then say: You know you are so stubborn, I want to take home but you... they are speaking in Afrikaans.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** You do not want to go home, if you can just tell me who your boyfriend is. I said I do not have a boyfriend and then he would slap one. Whose your sister, cousin whoever? I said I only have my mom. Because, they were going to end up taking my whole family.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** So, those were the communication that Mme Winnie gave us feedback on, you see. That if you say this, you should know that this is going to happen. So, we had already knew.

**Pudumo:** Because you were going to be giving them information if they had your cousin.

**Tshabalala:** Yes, you understand.

**Pudumo:** You would end up giving up the information to protect them.

**Tshabalala:** They would ask who your friend is and so on. Then when you don't give them information they would ask you to tell them about what is black power and what does it mean? I say black power what is it?

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** Even there I would say I do not know what that is, it is the first time I hear it from you, you explain it what is black power.

**Pudumo:** [Interviewer laughing].

**Tshabalala:** You are telling me about black power, I didn't say that.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** You just told me about black power, so what is black power? Then he would take you to the torture room and when you arrive there they are going to do things to you. From there you are taken back to your cell.

**Pudumo:** Can I ask you the last question, when you talk about liberation struggle what is it that is important that the people should know about it?

**Tshabalala:** You know, the life that the children these days are living it brings pain to us, because the liberation struggle we lived hard lives because we thought that we were fighting for them. There was a time when we brought down trains in Cape Town and unscrewed screws of railway lines. First train we knew it carried boers, it is a 4 am train. Reason was that we didn't want our parents to continue going to work and struggle there at that job, we fought for the hardship and we wanted better education and life. You see, nowadays our children smoke *nyaope* [street drug] and they kill one another and other people. That is not what we fought for; we were not fighting for that. We fought to see a better future for blacks.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** You see, we wanted a better future. As the boers stayed in suburbs in town and had all those sort of things money etc. We also wanted our people to also have their own things.

**Pudumo:** Yes.

**Tshabalala:** But it is like the children of these days, they don't see that, they only see the freedom and don't know how that freedom was achieved.

**Pudumo:** Yes, that is painful. I didn't want to touch on 1976 because you told me it is very emotional for you. Can I ask a personal question: are you married?

**Tshabalala:** I was married with Tshabalala, my husband passed away in 2010.

**Pudumo:** You have children?

**Tshabalala:** We had three boys. They are also unemployed up until now. That one...

**Pudumo:** It is very painful. Mama is there anything else that you would like to discuss or add?

**Tshabalala:** No, there isn't.

**Pudumo:** Thank you for your contribution.